

SENATE BILL 983  
By Miller J

AN ACT to name a certain bridge in McMinn County in honor of  
Billy Benton Stewart.

WHEREAS, from time to time, this General Assembly has named highways and bridges  
in honor of those outstanding individuals who during their lifetimes distinguished themselves  
through acts of bravery; and

WHEREAS, Billy B. Stewart is most assuredly one such exemplary individual; and

WHEREAS, on the morning of January 22, 1954, on his way to a work assignment, Mr.  
Stewart witnessed an approaching automobile swerve from the road as it neared a bridge and  
plunge into the rain-swollen Chestuee Creek; and

WHEREAS, as he hurried to the bridge, Mr. Stewart saw the automobile as it was swept  
fifty feet down the turbulent creek and disappeared from sight. Upon reaching the bridge, Mr.  
Stewart spied the occupants of the vehicle, a man, a woman, and their three-month-old baby,  
along with two other men, clinging precariously to a tree; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Stewart quickly took a rope from his truck and threw it across the creek  
to one of the men in the tree. His initial plan to pull the grievously injured woman to shore first

was soon disregarded as impossible because the rope spanned a channel of very swift water that was fifteen feet deep; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Stewart quickly crossed the bridge and, having one of the men secure his end of the rope to the tree, valiantly plunged into the seven-foot-deep icy water to grasp the loose end. Mr. Stewart, using two more ropes, established a lifeline by tying his end to a fence post near the road; and

WHEREAS, with no thought to his personal safety, Mr. Stewart, using the rope for support, swam through the treacherous current to the stranded people and, with the help of one of the men, brought the injured mother ashore while the two remaining men carefully carried the baby to safety; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Stewart, a man of quick and decisive action, incredible valor, and unwavering bravery, risked his own life that morning in a successful attempt to rescue five individuals from the ravages of nature; now, therefore,

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1. Notwithstanding any other provision of law to the contrary, the bridge spanning Chestuee Creek in McMinn County, located on U.S. Highway 411, 1.5 miles south of its intersection with Tennessee Highway 39, is hereby designated as the "Billy B. Stewart Bridge" in recognition of the man who rescued five people in dire need of assistance on the morning of January 22, 1954.

SECTION 2. The department of transportation is directed to erect suitable signs or to affix suitable markers designating such bridge as the "Billy B. Stewart Bridge".

SECTION 3. The erection of such signs shall be within the guidelines prescribed by the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices.

SECTION 4. This act shall become operative only if the federal highway administrator advises the commissioner of transportation in writing that the provisions of this act shall not

render Tennessee in violation of federal laws and regulations and subject to penalties prescribed therein.

#### SECTION 5.

(1) This act shall become operative only if McMinn County, Tennessee, either remits the estimated cost of the erection of such signs to the department of transportation within one (1) year of the effective date of this act or manufactures such signs in accordance with the provisions of subdivision (2). McMinn County shall make such payment prior to any expenditure by the state for the manufacture or installation of such signs. The department shall return any unused portion of the estimated cost to McMinn County within thirty (30) days of the erection of such signs. If the actual cost exceeds the estimated cost, McMinn County shall remit an amount equal to the difference in such costs to the department within thirty (30) days of receiving an itemized invoice of the actual cost from the department.

(2) McMinn County may manufacture and erect such signs provided, that such signs are manufactured and erected pursuant to state and federal guidelines and approved by the department.

SECTION 6. This act shall take effect upon becoming a law, the public welfare requiring it.